

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is pleased to announce that they will, once again, offer school, youth, and community groups the opportunity to visit Sandy Point National Wildlife Refuge during the 2005 leatherback sea turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) nesting season.

Since 1981, the United States Virgin Islands (USVI) Division of Fish and Wildlife (DPNR) has run a comprehensive study of the biology of the leatherback sea turtles nesting on the beaches of Sandy Point NWR. Education has been an important component of the study since its inception.

Sandy Point NWR, as an important nesting site for these endangered turtles, provides unique educational opportunities for the surrounding community. Every nesting season, hundreds of local students and adults visit Sandy Point to witness both leatherback nesting and hatchling emergence. The program, started in 1997 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, plays an important role in the conservation of the leatherback sea turtle.



Throughout the history of the Leatherback Research Project, there has been a steady increase in the number of turtles nesting each season. The combination of increases in both public awareness and nesting turtles created a need for a visitor program which would allow community members to see turtles while ensuring the protection of this globally endangered species.

The Sandy Point Sea Turtle Education Program makes the community an integral part of the protection of sea turtles and their habitats. In doing so, it fosters a conservation ethic which extends to all aspects of the natural community. An educated and concerned public is our greatest ally when it comes to the preservation of sites such as Sandy Point. The visitor program shows visitors a world they may never have seen before. This is especially true of our local, young people since St. Croix has no zoos or natural history museums. For many of these children, this is their first opportunity to interact with a wild animal.

Since 1997, thousands of schoolchildren and local adults have visited Sandy Point to see leatherback sea turtles nesting. Beginning on 1 March, we will be accepting reservations from school, youth, and community groups for trips in April, May, June, and July. Weekend nights are limited to school and youth groups and reservations are only accepted for groups of 15 to 30 people at a time.

For more information, please contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at 773-4554. After 1 March, call 690-9452 for reservation information.

*The Service manages the 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses more than 530 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish*

*hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies.*